



The Right Reverend
Paul Moore Jr.

Statement for the United Nations Special Committee on
Decolonization
Bishop Paul Moore, Jr.
Episcopal Bishop of New York, Retired
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Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Special Committee
on Decolonization,

Last December, my wife Brenda and I visited East Timor under
the auspices of Asia Watch, a human rights committee located in
New York. We wished to show our support for those who are
struggling for their rights there and to gather as much first-
hand information as our time there allowed.

Because a good deal of debate before the Special Committee
on Decolonization has been devoted to the issue of what is or is
not currently happening in East Timor, I believe that the results
of our visit will be of interest to the honorable chairman and
the members of the Special Committee. Even though our visit took
place last December, all indications are that the current
situation approximates what we witnessed.

When we arrived in East Timor and checked into the Hotel
Tourismo in Dili, we immediately sensed the presence of security
forces. A prominent official from Jakarta occupied an adjoining
room. Four or five security people accompanied him. During our

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visit we were told that many of the people with whom we met or even those with whom we had a casual exchange were interrogated about our conversations. Apparently, the tapping of telephones is so blatant that in one instance, we were told, the monitor requested the caller not to speak in Portuguese because the monitor only spoke Indonesian. All mail to and from the island is censored.

Under such conditions, where the basic right of free expression is so sadly lacking, Mr. Chairman and honorable members of the Special Committee, it seems evident that Indonesian authorities have many things they would prefer to conceal in East Timor.

From what we were able to see, the military presence is oppressive. In Dili, soldiers roam the streets in uniform and carrying weapons. When we tried to drive up the coast to Baucau, we had a difficult time finding anyone who would drive us. As if by magic, no drive-it-yourself cars were available for hire in any of the agencies we checked with. En route we were stopped and questioned by military police six times. Truckloads of soldiers in combat gear passed us on the road. We observed many military vehicles, including tanks. WE were told by reliable sources that there are 24,000 Indonesian troops in East Timor.

Apparently, the troops harass poor people in rural areas of East Timor, forcing villagers to leave their land-- which the military or those acting on their behalf then lay claim to and farm for profit. We were told of a military raid on a school of

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small children, supposedly to find some of the leaders of a pro-independence demonstration. Allegedly, the soldiers fired their rifles and terrified the children. We were also told that many false arrests were made after the pro-independence demonstration during the Pope's visit in October 1989. The boys -- for that is what they were -- said they were tortured when they were arrested to make them admit to subversive behavior. At the time of our visit, twelve youths were still being held without trial. As I understand it, all but two are now free. However, when we met with Bishop Belo, we found more than a dozen boys taking refuge in his residence, for fear of arrest. Reliable information that has become available since our visit to East Timor last December indicates strongly that new detentions and torture of prisoners continue. There have also been recent reports of executions and other killings by the military.

From our talks, it was evident that the role of the church is crucial. We called on Bishop Belo upon our arrival. Since we could not notify him of our visit ahead of time, he was suspicious and unwilling to talk at first. After a while he opened up and began to tell us of his predicament. On the one hand, he did not want to endanger his people nor to elicit sanctions against church institutions by the Indonesian military. On the other hand, he is one of the very few voices who dares to speak out. He is still being harassed because of his appeal to the United Nations last year. Bishop Belo, and many of the other

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church leaders we spoke to, feel that the people of East Timor are threatened with cultural genocide. The bishop feels it is essential to keep hope alive, especially for the younger generation, by insisting on the right of the East Timorese to have a referendum to decide the form of government they would like to have. In other words, the bishop told us that the outside world should insist on one of the principles that has guided the United Nations since its foundation, namely the right to self-determination.

Asia Watch, under whose auspices we travelled to East Timor, does not take a position on the territorial status of East Timor. However, I affirm (although it is not for me to say what form that government should take) any momentum that can be generated toward a situation in which East Timorese can peacefully decide their own future.

However, in the meantime, I feel strongly that every effort should be made to educate the able young East Timorese in skills which they can use as the country is developed in the future, because it is inevitable that development will occur. As development proceeds, it is essential that East Timorese youth qualify for the skilled jobs that become available; otherwise, the East Timorese will once again be exploited.

We left East Timor with many conflicting feelings. First of all we were deeply touched by the suffering of these warmhearted people and felt their sense of despair. And we admired the

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courage with which they face a seeming bleak future. In East Timor we heard from the bishop and other people that hope for independence is the only thing that keeps the Timorese people alive after the huge loss of life and terrible tragedy they have known. It is our strong hope that the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization and other United Nations agencies will redouble their efforts to address both the humanitarian needs of the people of East Timor as well as the internationally-recognized right of the people of East Timor to speak out for their self-determination.

In closing, Mr. Chairman and honorable members of the Special Committee on Decolonization, I would like to draw your attention to some encouraging developments in the United States Congress regarding East Timor. For many years, and once again in 1990, members of the United States Congress have been consistently voicing concern over the suffering in East Timor, and the need for an equitable solution to the conflict, in addition to timely measures in the humanitarian and human rights fields. The United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization, and others concerned, should be assured that such activities are growing in strength and importance. This is but one sign that the tragedy of East Timor continues to generate international sympathy and attention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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